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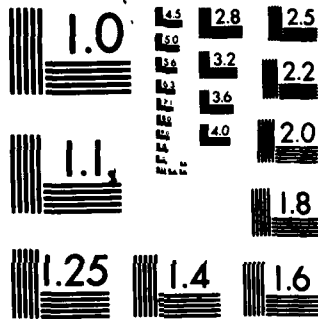
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Effects of Rating Purpose and Rater Self-Esteem on Performance Ratings¹

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Abstract

The influences of intended rating purpose (administrative vs. employee counseling) and rater self-esteem on ratings of employee performance were examined in a laboratory study, using a 2x2 analysis of variance design. Results indicate that low self-esteem raters assign significantly higher performance ratings when performance appraisal information will be used to make administrative decisions than when performance ratings will be used to provide employees with performance feedback and counseling. In addition, rater self-esteem and rating purpose affected raters' perceptions of the quality of their evaluations. Implications and alternative interpretations of the data are discussed.

Effects of Rating Purpose and Rater Self-Esteem on Performance Ratings

In recent years, performance appraisal research has begun to focus on the process of rating: how the interrelation of various rater, ratee and organizational context characteristics might influence the resulting ratings. Landy and Farr (1980) have suggested that a fuller understanding of performance appraisal requires such an interactive focus, and call for more research along these lines. The present study examined the independent and interactive effects of two variables on performance ratings: 1) a rating process variable--the intended purpose of ratings (ratings intended either for administrative decision-making or performance feedback functions) and 2) a rater characteristic--self-esteem.

Several studies have found performance ratings to be significantly more lenient when these ratings are intended for administrative use rather than for research purposes (Taylor and Wherry, 1951; Sharon and Bartlett, 1969; Sharon, 1970; Landy and Farr, 1980). However, the relative impact of the more typical organizational functions of performance appraisal information: administrative decision-making and performance feedback functions, has yet to be explored. Evaluation of this relationship would be highly relevant for ongoing organizations, as performance ratings are frequently used for one or both of these two functions.

Ratings intended for administrative or feedback purposes impact upon the employee and his/her career development in the organization in different ways. An important question to ask is whether administrative ratings would continue to exhibit the demonstrated pattern of favorability when compared with ratings intended for employee performance feedback. In order to answer this question, it is necessary to consider the rater's perceptions of the impact of the ratings

on the ratee. In the case of administrative ratings the impact is direct--the resulting pay raises and promotions are concrete, visible outcomes that affect the employee's career in the organization. The impact of feedback ratings is attenuated by the lack of these immediate outcomes, though performance improvements from feedback may contribute to employee advancement in the long run. For this reason we would expect that raters would be more prone to leniency bias when they expect performance information to be used for administrative purposes.

Individual characteristics that the rater brings with him/her to the rating task may influence performance evaluations (Landy and Farr, 1980). Self-esteem may be one of many such influential variables, as it has been shown to affect perceptions of self-confidence (Beer et al, 1959), competency (Gelfand, 1962), and reliance upon the opinions of others (Hochbaum, 1954). These studies indicated that individuals low in self-esteem have less self-confidence, feel less competent, and rely more on others' opinions than do individuals high in self-esteem. In addition, Beer et al (1959) found that low self-accepting individuals are less able to exercise independence of thought in decision-making than those high in self-acceptance. Individuals low in self-acceptance are also less confident and more likely to view criticism as a threat to their self-concept than are individuals high in self-acceptance.

In spite of these relevant findings, the potential influence of self-esteem on the assignment of performance ratings has yet to be completely assessed. It follows from the research findings cited earlier that low self-esteem raters might feel less certain of their rating judgments due to their lower self-confidence and feelings of competency, and tend therefore to assign more favorable ratings than individuals high in self-esteem. Perhaps low self-esteem raters may be concerned about unjustly jeopardizing the ratee's future in the organization, and therefore tend to give the ratee the "benefit of the doubt" about his/her performance. For the same reasons, we might expect that low self-esteem raters

may be especially responsive to the impact of "rating purpose" cues. If so, their lenient ratings would become even more pronounced when ratings will be used to make administrative decisions which will directly affect the ratee.

The major focus of the present study was an examination of the following hypotheses:

- 1) There is a main effect for rating purpose on the level of performance ratings. Specifically, we expected that administrative ratings would be significantly more favorable (lenient) than ratings intended for performance feedback.
- 2) There is a main effect for rater self-esteem on the level of performance ratings assigned. We expected low self-esteem raters to assign significantly more favorable (lenient) ratings than raters high in self-esteem.
- 3) There is a rating purpose x self-esteem interaction. We expected that the purpose of rating would have a larger effect on low self-esteem raters than on high self-esteem raters.

METHOD

Subjects. Seventy-one subjects, both male and female, were recruited from an introductory psychology class, and randomly assigned to one of the two rating purpose conditions.

Procedure. A 2x2 analysis of variance design was used to assess the effects of rating purpose and rater self-esteem on rating favorability and perceived confidence and accuracy in rating. All subjects viewed a videotape of a hypothetical worker performing a marble-sorting task (adapted from Scott and Hamner, 1975) and then rated this performance on an appraisal form consisting of 7 7-point ratings (1=extremely poor or extremely disagree, 7=extremely good or extremely agree) covering five performance dimensions: performance quantity, performance quality, efficiency, motivation and coordination. In addition,

subjects rated the confidence and accuracy they felt in assigning their ratings (again on 7-point scales). Last, subjects were asked to what extent they would have preferred being able to consult with other raters before making their ratings, given that they were rating individually. It was expected that the less confident and the less accurate a rater felt, the more likely it would be for the rater to indicate a preference for consulting with other raters.

In order to manipulate rating purpose, half of the subjects (n=34, administrative decision-making condition) were informed that their ratings would be used to help decide whether or not the worker should receive a pay raise. The other half of the subjects (n=37, performance feedback condition) were informed that their ratings would serve to help advise the employee on how to become a better worker.

Self-esteem was measured by the Rosenberg self-esteem scale (Rosenberg, 1965) and high and low self-esteem was delineated by a median split.

Thus the following four combinations were obtained:

- 1) Administrative Decision-Making Purpose/High Self-Esteem (n=19)
- 2) Performance Feedback Purpose/High Self-Esteem (n=17)
- 3) Administrative Decision-Making Purpose/Low Self-Esteem (n=15)
- 4) Performance Feedback Purpose/Low Self-Esteem (n=20)

A 2x2 analysis of variance was performed for each of the following dependent variables:

- a) performance scale composed of the sum of the 7 performance ratings
- b) raters' perceived confidence scores
- c) raters' perceived accuracy scores
- d) raters' expressed desire to confer with other raters

RESULTS

Results indicate that raters low in self-esteem are significantly affected by rating purpose. Low self-esteem raters assigned higher ratings in the administrative condition than in the feedback condition ($p < .05$). However, the hypothesized main effects and interaction effect of purpose and self-esteem on performance ratings were not supported, although all means were in the predicted direction. An examination of the cell means for the summary performance scale (refer to Table 1) indicates that most of the variance in performance ratings can be attributed to differences within low self-esteem raters.

As expected, results also indicate the tendency for high self-esteem raters to feel significantly more confident ($p < .05$) and accurate ($p < .05$) in their ratings than their low self-esteem counterparts. Contrary to expectation, the desire to consult with other raters was strongest for raters high in self-esteem ($p < .05$). The mean accuracy, confidence and desire to confer ratings are depicted in Table 2.

In addition, a main effect for rating purpose was observed for rater perceptions of the accuracy of their ratings ($p < .05$). Raters in the administrative decision-making condition felt more accurate in their ratings than raters in the performance feedback condition.

DISCUSSION

These findings suggest that the way in which performance appraisal information will be used by an organization may affect the manner in which some groups of raters assign performance ratings. Low self-esteem raters are apparently influenced by rating purpose; there is no evidence that raters high in self-esteem do so. Clearly these results are only suggestive, given the lack of support for the primary hypotheses. However, they raise some additional issues

which are interesting in and of themselves. For instance, an implicit assumption we (and others) have made is that raters interpret "rating purpose" cues in terms of the potential impact of performance evaluations on ratees. Further, we expected that raters would consistently perceive ratings made for administrative purposes as having a larger impact on employees than ratings made for feedback purposes. The current study did not provide the necessary information to test those assumptions. We have since gathered, and are currently analyzing, data which will provide a more powerful test of the original hypotheses. They will also allow us to test these underlying assumptions, and to empirically examine some alternative explanations for the manner in which the organizational function of performance appraisal may affect the evaluation process.

It also remains to be determined whether the uncertainty presumed to influence rating favorability is due in fact to the lack of self-confidence and self-assuredness on the part of low self-esteem raters, or instead to a need for more relevant performance information--information that might be obtained from other raters. If the latter is the case, the finding that consultation with other raters was most strongly desired by high self-esteem raters is curious. It may be, however, that such consultation is intended for ego-enhancement, since high self-esteem raters did consider themselves significantly more confident and accurate in their rating judgments than low self-esteem raters. Research designed to address these and related questions would provide a fruitful avenue of future inquiry.

Footnotes

1. A version of this paper was presented at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association, Washington, D. C., August, 1982.

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TABLE 1

Mean Ratings for the Summary Performance Scale
by Purpose and Self-Esteem

Rating Purpose	High Self-Esteem Low Self-Esteem		
Performance Feedback	29.24	29.55	29.4
Administrative Decision-Making	29.05	33.60	31.3
	29.15	31.58	

TABLE 2

Mean Ratings of Accuracy, Confidence and Desire to Confer
for High and Low Self-Esteem Raters⁺

	High Self-Esteem	Low Self-Esteem	F
Accuracy	5.722	5.057	6.218*
Confidence	5.694	5.086	4.708*
Desire to Confer	3.889	4.829	4.859*

*(p < .05)

⁺Scales were as follows for Accuracy and Confidence ratings:
1=inaccurate (unconfident)
7=accurate (confident)

Scale for Desire to Confer ratings is as follows:
1= very much desire to confer
7= not at all

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